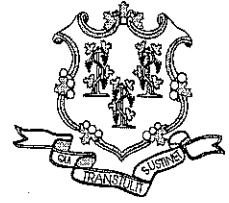




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony
Public Safety and Security Committee
February 7, 2013



Proposed H.B. No. 6011 AN ACT CREATING A JUVENILE FIRE SAFETY COLLABORATIVE

The Department of Children and Families **supports** Proposed H.B. No. 6011, An Act Creating a Juvenile Fire Safety Collaborative.

This bill would create a Juvenile Fire Safety Collaborative to design fire safety programs for families and juveniles and to conduct clinical interventions when necessary. It would be comprised of officials from the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Correction, the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, the Division of Criminal Justice and representatives from the state mental health, fire services and law enforcement communities.

While the Department of Children and Families and the Connecticut State Fire Marshal's office do not currently have a statistically reliable data collection capacity to identify our juvenile firesetting population, we can report that in 2004, 63% of people arrested for arson-related crimes in Connecticut were under the age of 18. In 2011, that percentage dropped to 48%.¹ Although the basis for this decline is unclear, it is likely that arrests of juvenile firesetters are dramatically underreported in Connecticut like many other states.

Youth involved with the misuse of fire do so for a variety of different reasons. The National Fire Academy identifies them in two different categories, Fire Starting and Fire Setting. The categorization is determined by the intent and motivation of person starting the fire. It could be because of curiosity, which is often the case for young children; a cry for help due to a crisis in the child's life or because of "delinquent" behavior.

Families of children that misuse fire are often more chaotic, children are poorly supervised, and display harsh and rigid parental discipline styles. Families have often been resistant to outpatient or community based services. Treatment drop out rates are high. These families are often involved with the criminal justice system as well the DCF.

In Connecticut, children/youth with firesetting behaviors are frequently placed in out-of-state residential care due to the lack of community based services and the public safety concerns over this high risk population. These costs are incurred by the Department of Children and

¹ <http://www.dpsdata.ct.gov/dps/ucr/data/2011/Connecticut%20Summary%20Statistics%202011.pdf>

Families, school districts, insurance companies and families. Since 2011, DCF has been committed to bringing children back from out-of-state residential placements and place in the least restrictive environment; ideally their community, whenever possible. However, placing or keeping these youth in-state has been challenging for the simple reason that we lack statewide community-based programs to effectively address these behaviors. The average cost for a specialized residential program that will treat this population is approximately \$358.99 per day or \$131,000 per year per child, not including education costs. Currently, there are 8 Connecticut children in out-of-state facilities being treated at cost of \$1,048,250 annually. This same challenge exists for these youth when they are arrested, sent to detention or and incarcerated. In Connecticut, the average daily rate for detention and incarceration is \$95.00 a day, or \$34,000 a year. For youth involved with firesetting due to a history of abuse or trauma, incarceration also has severe consequences including higher incidents of suicidal behaviors, stress-related illness and psychiatric problems.

Currently, there is an effort to implement a statewide National Fire Academy Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Program which provides education and treatment for any child misusing fire. An integral part of that program requires a coordinated effort of all the primary stakeholders in order to reach and effectively work with these youth in their community. The bill before you is aimed at doing just that. In 2008 the state of Maine successfully implemented an Executive Order establishing the "Maine Juvenile Fire Safety Collaborative." There are currently 20 "collaboratives" across the state which successfully triage, manage and provide a comprehensive approach to any child involved with firesetting.